SEQUOYA REVIEW 2002

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ON THE COVER Susan Burks */oil on canvas*

ARTWORK

BETH HIXSON *mixed media*

Laura McKee **STILL LIFE**

A man sits down to write a painting and begins
the moment before an overturned basket of January
pears tumbles from a table, their unbruised skins
are like the back of a woman he once watched
swim secretly the width of a river after the spring's
first thaw.

He is a boy hardly the length of her legs, and he
memorizes how her white arms darken the water
they push against. From the bank, he imagines
how blue veins wind the limbs of her body
like the pattern of roots tangled at the bottom
of fallen trees.

He writes her skin's texture in the lines of a rainstorm
that feeds the burning of an orchard, he writes
the tear of her stroke ripping through the river's
current. It is like the unwept vowels of a farmer
who watches ashen blossoms collapse
to the ground, taking on the pigment of rain.

He writes the air the farmer's wife will sigh
tonight reaching into an oven without mitts,
distracted by her husband's silence and
the foggy kitchen window steamed from the
outside.

He writes the crash of a pie to a floor,
the black circle it chars on the linoleum. He writes
the stillness of a hollow pan spinning on its side.

Kelly Moore **THE CITY IN THE ICEBERG**

The first time a blind man
found a ghost in his yard, he was tying
his hammock to the smell of summer.

The first time the sun ever spit fire,
the ocean was throwing its jellyfish at the clouds
like an ape in a tantrum.

The first time a book ever flew out the window,
it fluttered its pages and formed an "f"
in the sky with the gothic romances.

The first time a man and woman had sex,
they were trying to cure her appendicitis.

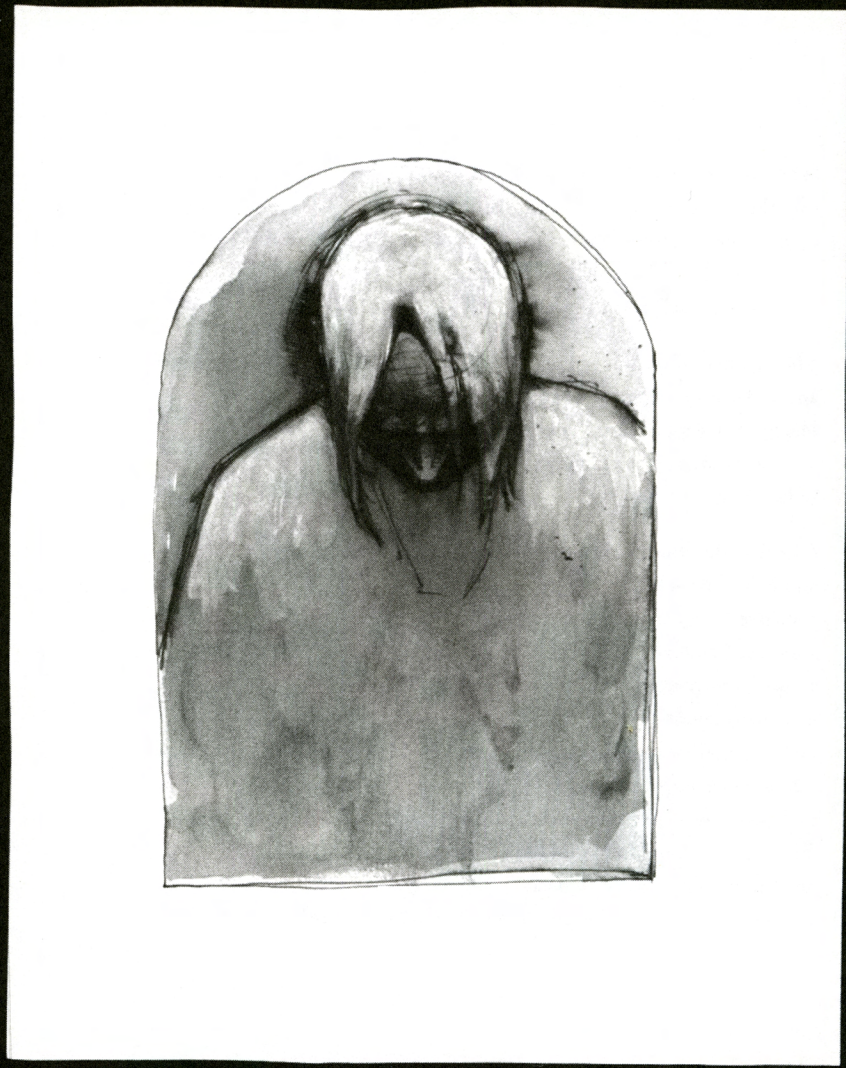
When the first woman died, the men thought God
was giving them back a rib. They stopped eating,
cut open their stomachs, and lay out
under the sun with the seals. This is where
we find the saying, "Good things come to those who wait."

When the first man died, the animals forgot
who they were and jumped off the cliffs in panic
until all the bottoms of cliffs
were covered in soft mounds of fur. This
is where the "bed" was discovered.

The first high diver was walking in his sleep
and woke at the moment when he lost his stomach.
His mother slapped him when he resurfaced—
she always thought her child was an outgrowth
of her stomach ache.

One day, the wind pushed the great mountain on both sides
and it fell into itself.
someone found an ancient city inside an iceberg,
someone found after 300,054 days that the sun
is too far away to shoot with a bow and arrow
and shot himself
and the mothers thought their children would fall back into their wombs.
The animals stopped diving off cliffs
and began using pneumonic devices like "daffy duck" and "bugs bunny."
The penguins wouldn't swim back to the land,
the falling snow seemed to mean
that the sky was squeezing all our people against the earth.

MATTHEW CONNER Ecce Homo */ink drawing*



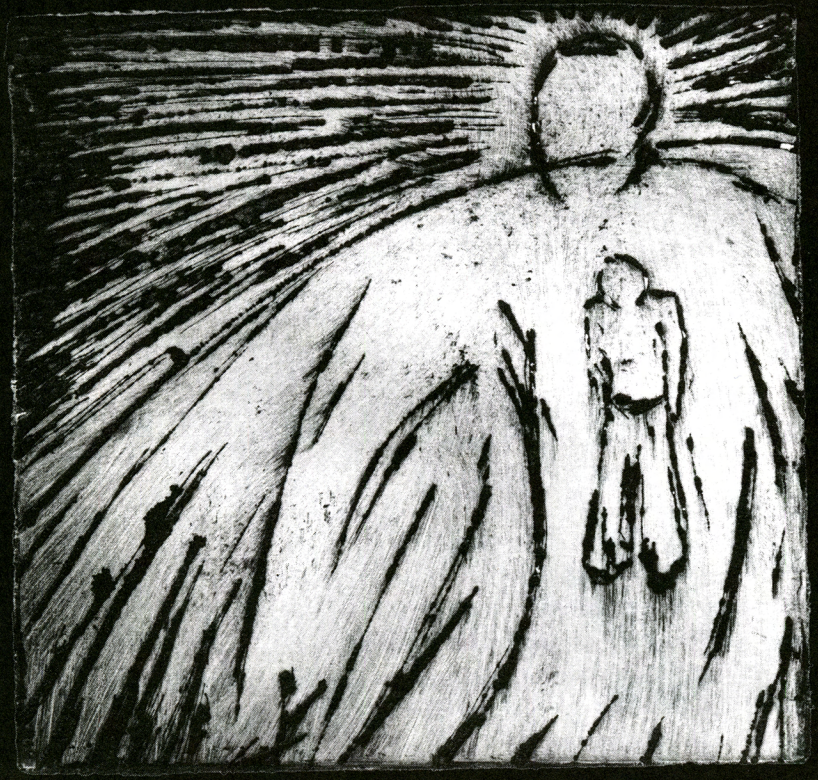
Jym Annear **MERCENARY**

Sometimes I think we're
mercenaries standing with
our guns in each other's
faces. We're proud of
our weapons, shining pieces
of silver and lust. Maybe I
think that you think we can only
stand this way so long. Maybe you
are wondering why the rifles
in our hands are reflecting
a sky in the silver, beyond
the ceiling someone built
for us repeatedly years ago.
Maybe you think it's time for
a change, and you will lower
the barrel of your weapon
just a bit, and I will fire.

Lindsey Gosma NOT KNOWING HOW TO SWIM

Treading water in the depths of the stars, I realize
that God must have a haven or at least a summer home
in the Alps, far away from the sterile city light of
his Vegas daily life and the annoying beggars of
shadowed alleys, pinched between bank and high-rise, pointing to
Orion and his trendy belt, just like the one I stole
from the dollar store for the hell of it. I'm a poor little soul.
I deserve a boyfriend who often reminds me that I'm his God.
Do I really need to rule a universe, find a way
to control and manipulate every aspect of this
world sheltered by the scarves of a thousand deaths. There's
a meanness in my voice I don't care to force upon the rest
of the miniscule lovers I see mingling in
the open air markets of six weeks in the summer heat,
glistening under those same stars that blinded Aristotle
when he gazed upon his true love a little too closely,
a little too intently. The passions of science are
apt in their description of space and time, life and death of
stars, humans, and bipeds from 15,000 BC, but
a shore yet unknown in town, still hiding in
solitude where our logistics and our loves will never
caress the sands of past centuries. No one needs
to understand our representational model of
perception. Berkeley was right, there never was a
substance, just that funny feeling in the backs of our minds.

JOSEPH CICCOLINE *intaglio print*



Ezra Plemons

GETTING LAID OFF BY THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

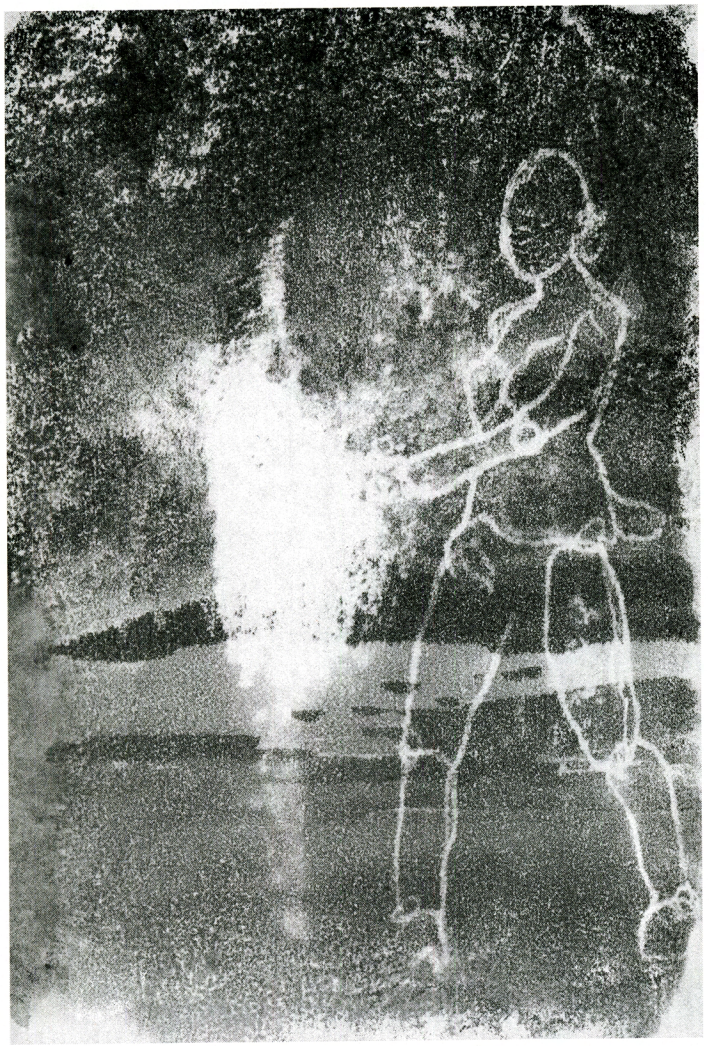
So it seems lately I am led everywhere
by the hand. A patch of grass
behind the interstate is the only place
I know I can find on my own. The earth here
is deep like an ocean, and when I lay down
in it I float like a compass magnet and the sky
is the only thing I can see. For days
I have not seen a butterfly or bird or jet-
trail, not anywhere. The bluest sky
is the only thing left; the world
has emptied out for me and vanished.

I made a painting once. It had white
stenciled letters on a white field and did
not use the letter O at all. Mark, if
he wanted it, could hang it on his wall forever.
Did you know, when two fields of blue
meet and overlap, that optically a line
of orange is made between them. It exists
only in the air, or in the excitement and charge
between the particles hidden between
the retina and the brain. It's an afterimage
that could not wait for after. But what
happens if you blink?

Joel Andrews **PORTENT**

If that was the way things worked,
I would tell you that it's not enough
To run from anything that turns within itself;
To unwrap your hopes more cautiously—
The way you turn over rotting logs
With the heels of your palms
And your fingers curled back in objection.
But you knew what you'd find.
There was nothing for me to say
When you saw its back
Disappearing into the mist.
I played my part—
The vessel of destruction.
So don't look at me with your questions
When your feet dip below the warmed waters
Into the ever colder depths below.
It was bound to happen sooner or later.
In spite of the blur of life, I knew it,
The first time I heard a falling star.

KATIE MEYER *transfer drawing*



Hannah Gamble **UP THE THROAT**

He, a small iron man at the bee
museum, has been named Pete by me.
His jaw is hard from chewing so much
bubble gum. His beard is rusty,
because whenever he cries, he grows
so languid with self pity, that he cannot
wipe the tears away. His mouth is always
slightly open, because although he loves
the bees in his stomach, he wants them
to come and go as they please, or it is not love.

He dreams of a wife he will someday have,
named Vivian or Violet. She will love him
because his breath smells like honey,
and his sweat smells like honey,
and that makes his whole being
an allusion to The Song of Solomon,
which makes him romantic.

He will be allowed to come and go
as he pleases, because otherwise,
it is not love, and he will occasionally
have affairs with women named Valisa
or Marigold, who might have unusually
large lips or permed red hair.

While he is away, Vivian or Violet
will stay at home and make honey toast
for herself. She will dip a spatula into
one of her one hundred honey pots and drizzle
it in front of her eyes in a golden sheet so that
the world looks yellow and she can't see
the spot on the floor where the dog has peed
and she can't see the pile of shirts that she
is supposed to iron for Pete.

But Pete is never around people on Mondays
and Tuesdays when the bees leave him
to gather more pollen in their hair.
He is always melancholy on these days.
He likes the way that the bees hum inside
of him, like a thousand parts of his engine,
letting him know that he's on. They, like
the Aztecs, are constructing golden cities
inside of him. When they leave, the work
stops, and things inside feel very quiet.
Sometimes Pete feels a still unease, because
then he is a planet with a ghost town
in the middle. Vivian or Violet often says,
"But at least they come back, and smelling
of clover." Hmmm…

He knows that one day they will not
come back, because once, Pete had ants
in his stomach, and they built tall cities
and mountainsides. They, unlike the bees,
did not leave at all, until they climbed up
and away, inspired by their poets who wrote
about the patch of light that could be seen
up the throat and through Pete's ever open
mouth. Poets always agreed and disagreed
because the oldest called it desk-lamp,
while the younger called it sunlight,
and the youngest called it heaven.

SUSANN LINDQVIST Strand / *photograph*

HOW ANESTHESIA AFFECTS BOXER'S MEMORY WHICH IN TURN AFFECTS SEA LEVEL WHICH LEAVES US WITH LITTLE UNAFFECTED SPACE IN WHICH TO THINK CLEARLY WHICH REMINDS BOXER OF THE APPLE, WHICH HE WILL NOW DISCUSS.

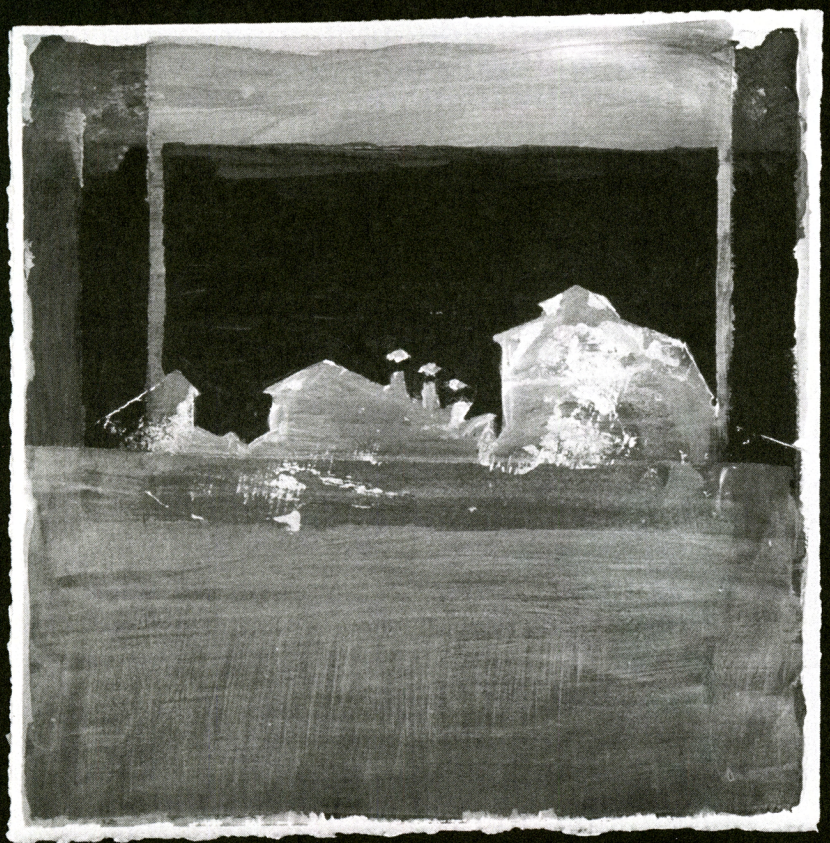
Mark Bilbrey

The apple is absolutely red with
the exception of a few great strains
which have inevitably hobbled its development.
This reminds me of my childhood,
which, though pretty, was mostly a storm.
When I was a baby, remember, I had not
even teeth, yet chewed my mother to death.
My ambition was bounding, which I should say
got me halfway to the Olympic trials.
Disregarding a few spare moments of heightened awareness
(when, for instance, my father hilariously floated
Condom Good-Year from our hotel window
over Olympic Park and later heaved I should follow
if not for my auspicious talent for obtaining endorsements) I
was nearly landlocked entirely. This has been
the case in every circumstance. That is,
I walled the door, he threw me to the floor.
I'd give him a shiner, he'd give me one finer.
In to the shrink, who tickled me pink.
I have stumbled to tell you this, but am reminded
how vividly I almost forgot the time I almost died
and was basically *in* the handbasket tracing
all the good-byes I could remember into the air with my finger
when a young girl in another basket said to me:
What you gotta realize is we gotta exist here
with these materials on this wicked-ass earf.
That was it for my leaping. I was demoted directly
to soft foods. Visitors visited (albeit slow and quiet).
And I remembered, eventually, my father crying
so his wrinkles made almost a tiny delta, streams
offering him to the ocean around his face, where I lived.

Mary Wier **POISED IN MID-AIR**

The terns, diving, rush quickly over
the turbulent ocean, black and green
glinting in light. They are spearing fish,
are washed in foam. Far from my tiny
altar where I genuflect daily to dreams
and fears, they spin seawater into a world
they know. Often, I think of them, pushing
into the wind, their calm eyes resting
against nothing, while I wish for a better
worship of something useful—I want
their gliding in the sea-spray, their mouthful
of fish, their puffed feathers gathering green—
I want the solid flesh of their turning
back to shore, satisfied and not afraid to sleep.

JASON SIMS *acrylic on paper*



This was found on a body— apparently a period piece:

Jason Duvall **STRANGE IDEA OF A LULLABY**

If hummingbirds were the size of ravens then we'd all be in trouble. The nectar of the skull is inscrutably sweet and tiny beaks can peck while wings sweep humid air into the cracks of mirrors. I have to say, first, that I have never appeared in print. I have also yet to appear out of print. I'll take years.

To say that the peach appreciates the picker is an understatement. To say that the preacher drank too much that night is not. I can't say enough about this.

Mystery writers are always showing up dead, not in print of course because they wrote it, but at parties with slick ties and ketchup throats. It's sad to know how much luggage was lugged, how many cast-iron typewriters are out there in the night waiting for a gentleman or lady to return. There is an elegance, an economy in the simple word no, but finality? Never. One always expects an appeal.

Last night I was drunk so I called myself for a sober ride. The me at the party was pale-faced when I arrived. There is not such a crisis here as one would expect. One always expects to hear the word "no."

Chad said Charlie was a window. Who knew he knew metaphor? But of course he'd meant that Charlie was simple, like a naked "id," or a clear idea. He'd meant that you could see right through him. I thought for a moment, wept, posited: "But what if You were playing ball in his yard, knocked a stray through his window and had to fidget on the doorstep waiting for some old woman to answer, an old woman with a daughter waiting upstairs who hasn't left the house since her period started, a daughter who'd marry you if you had the key to the locked pine box that was her only furniture." As I said, I wept.

The girl on the ladder, picking cherries, wishing she had a cherry-picker isn't thinking about anything. The novel that she triggers never forms eyelids and is rejected. Like the girl on the ladder, picking cherries, it had a quiet climax. When she felt at home that night, she took off her plain dress. Underneath was a tight knot of scar tissue. She swears it held her together, his gaze that is, from the passing car thinking about her thinking about nothing wishing she had a cherry picker.

Mystery writers always have plain autographs in their scrapbooks. They collect names of people you've never heard that write not about butlers, but about birds—birds that are too smart to fly smack into windows, birds that wait for an opening, birds that lick their lips like crocodiles.

Chad said Charlie was drunk. We had to take away his keys. It's this sort of correlation that makes me laugh, like the coincidence of my reflection visiting the same mirror that I visit every morning. But not this morning. This morning there was a girl in the mirror. I'm not sure how I knew the difference. You see, I've never recognized myself. Every morning the stranger visits the mirror and I wonder who has license enough to remove the hair. Who should collect, then, the lashes.

When I get in trouble I call myself for an alibi. True, I can't trust him, but he's there every morning like clockwork, like the way my pages are always on time, ready to turn tricks like the girl for your fingers, ready to drink their supper—all about appeal.

And when I went for sentencing I said, out of embarrassment for the flapping beast: "Oh, this thing? It's just whispering in my ear." And while the judge was confounded, I fingered the key in my pocket, sure I had a story. Some lawns are built for trespassing (like Her bed hadn't been built for sleep.) I got my ball back. I cut my hands on glass. I missed my deadline. Now, even I won't return my calls, and every night when I peel the covers I hear one round word: "No" is whispered in my ear.

JUSTIN GOODLETT *photograph*

Anna Williams OCTOBER, THE SUNDAY OF MONTHS

This poem you cannot use to carry eggs
or apples, even green ones with the spots
of late afternoon sun we appreciate with
deep breaths. It is the color of a wooden
chair in your living room and the color of
the skin behind your ears when the sun is
behind you, you're radiant, like the darkness
of closed eyes on a summer afternoon.

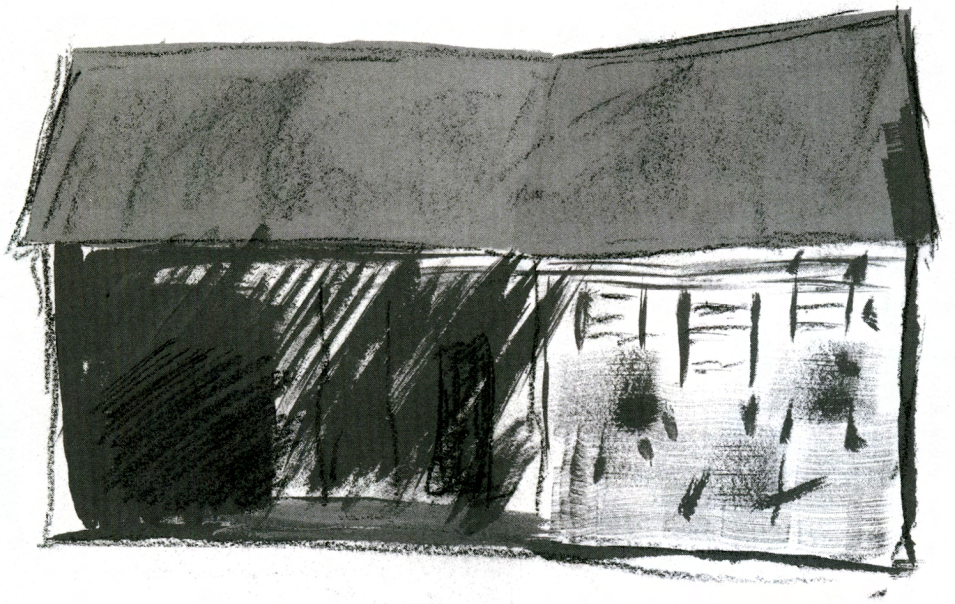
Tonight it is colder than it has been
in a hundred years and in this house which
had been invaded by plagues of insects
the wind will sneak in through the cracks
in the floor, try to beat down the fire which
warms our fingertips. And I will be so grateful
for the way you slide your hands gently
into your pockets. Our minds will rest equally
on the apple pickers who will have to wait out
the frost and the fog loving the mountain.
Thoughts will rush to how the slightest breeze
can change the direction of the leaves.

This morning, driving down the mountain there
wasn't the usual smell of burning breaks, but
the smell of smokeless burning woods. And I
thought of you, perched in your cabin, smothered
by spiders' webs, choked by kudzu insisting its
way through windows. It wasn't anything like
the split second the sun wins through the rain.
Something far inside me flickered, and went out.

Christie Parris PLASTIC BOXES

When I cannot sleep, I wonder
in the hallways of a hospital.
I worry about a woman born eight hours ago.
They put her in a plastic
box and tag her for inventory's sake,
for life. Her mother does not seem
to notice the daughter's inarticulate pleas.
Fires burn.
Bills are paid.
Trees bow their heads
in disgrace. 2 kids are in a fistfight
over the perfect hopscotch rock
while mama sucks her first cigarette in 8 months. God
poked his head out
of the shower curtain
and asked what all the commotion is about.
We bang on ceilings
when the neighbors dance—
there is a baby on the way.

EMILY DEMPSEY *mixed media*



Do you ever get tired of the static
on your car radio? Imagine that
you can't change the channel,
turn it off, or turn it down. Now,
what do you do if that's in your head?
You pick up all these different radio
frequencies, but you can't control it,
so sometimes you just get hours of static
(or radio evangelists, but let's think
positively here). Well, maybe they could
help you. They helped Maggie. She
compulsively played dueling banjoes
on her mandolin every Sunday at 5 am,
but they got her a real banjo and now
she plays it whenever she wants (as long
as it's a Wednesday at noon, but the point is,
she doesn't have to play it) and she's learning
other songs too. So if your problem
is radio frequencies, then maybe
they could fine tune it for you. I have to
warn you, though, the others might not
like it at first (you meet in small groups
for support). There was one guy
who could see through walls and they all
wanted to know where the problem was.
After all, seeing through walls seems like
more of a superpower than a problem,
right? But he was always running into things,
and he thought the power might be
growing. What if he saw through everything?
What would he see? That scared them,
so they made him top priority and now
he just spies occasionally or looks to see
what's in the fridge without getting up.
Anyway, they might do that at first
with your noise, but I really think
they could help you. They specialize
in people who have problems with time.

Not time management, but people
whose time moves too slowly. In my case
it moved too quickly, so they're teaching me
to move faster.

LIZ TAPP *ink drawing*

Liz Foster THE GARDENER

Searching for the answers on man I understood
Jeans were the gold mine I had been searching for
And listening to them swish, blue filled cylinders
Shaping his perfectly round ass; I concluded my hands
Were left empty too long.

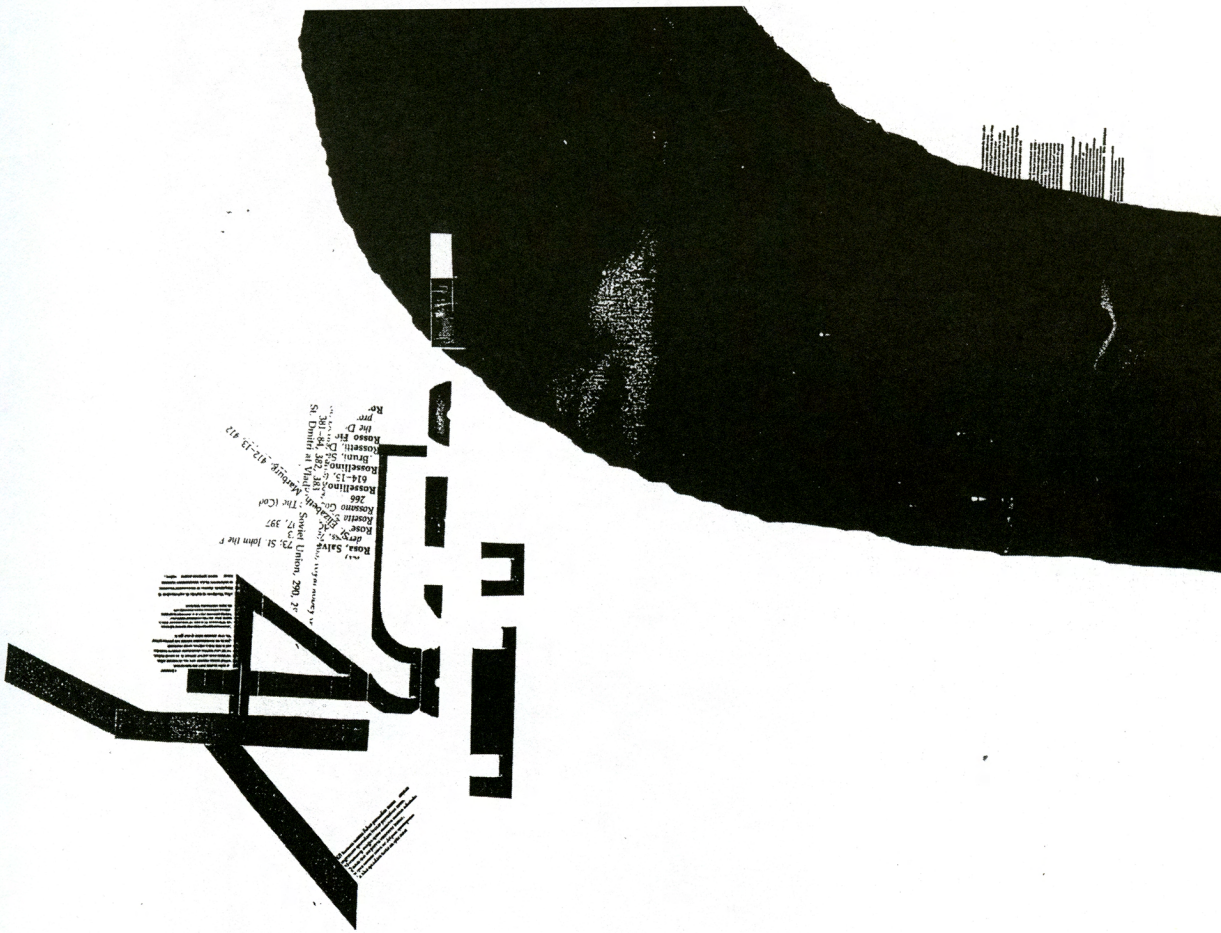
When he found a four-leaf clover
And we were yanked out of paradise; I felt shame
When he stepped in a puddle, and then the anthill.
We were scared of a snake in our path and he screamed
Out of fear as the garden hoe was thrown to the ground,
Even though I knew he had wanted to throw it at me
When I hissed.

Perhaps no harm was meant as we walked
Through isles of nails, bolts, and then lumber,
Trees cut down perhaps from pine sawfly or lack of water,
And may have caused an overabundance of tree-houses
Built for next summer.

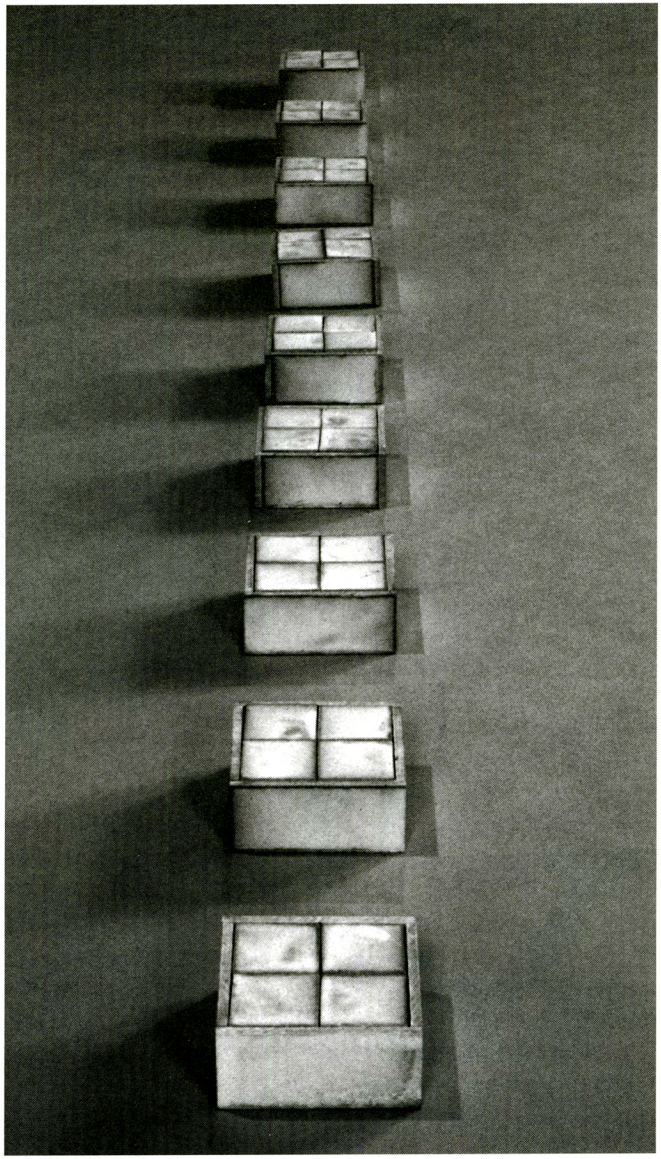
Walking through the dead forests,
We did not look in each other's eyes, for we felt the weight of destruction
Especially because of the season, even though he had spent months
Planting evergreens and plants that would at least survive through winter,
Through the black soil on his hands and the callouses on his palms,
Making his sense of touch even harder to grasp.

I knew I'd ponder
For years and years to come, twiddling my thumbs in a rocking chair
On the front porch with a soft quilt on my lap thinking about the gate
Swinging open and shut but how no one ever passed through it.

MANDY LAMB *xerography*



ADAM WHITE *gesso on wood*



Taylor Loy **BORIS THE MAN SKINNER**

When you skin a man you'll find
he peels like ripening fruit.
He will scream when he has nothing
to confess; pay no mind
when you hear him.
The ineffable skinning is key.
The cryptography of silence urges
care in the carving. In between
the shoulder blades and the
base of the skull lies
an area of exquisite tenderness.
If you tear the map here, you will
not be able to reconstruct
the man and save the mind. If then
he speaks, his words
do not equal our words.
Lay the skull bare.
The face, perhaps now horrific,
is a primal glyph of the
inquisitive nature of man.
Monosyllabic words like
"no" or "why" will rise like
the water table in a storm.
The fruit is then ripe, and
a dream reader is called
to interpret the contours
of the skull. What life was stolen
will reveal itself.
I, Boris, can help you.
In Russia it was severe and cold
during the war. I divined
the soul from steam drawn
up from the body, a pit
of a well. There were kilometers
of corpses and I, but one man.

Kelly Moore **PULLING UP RIVERS**

This is why they poured their salt
into the lakes. It was like dropping
change into the fish's mouths
and tossing their hair
back over their shoulders
and saying, "This
is how you do it."

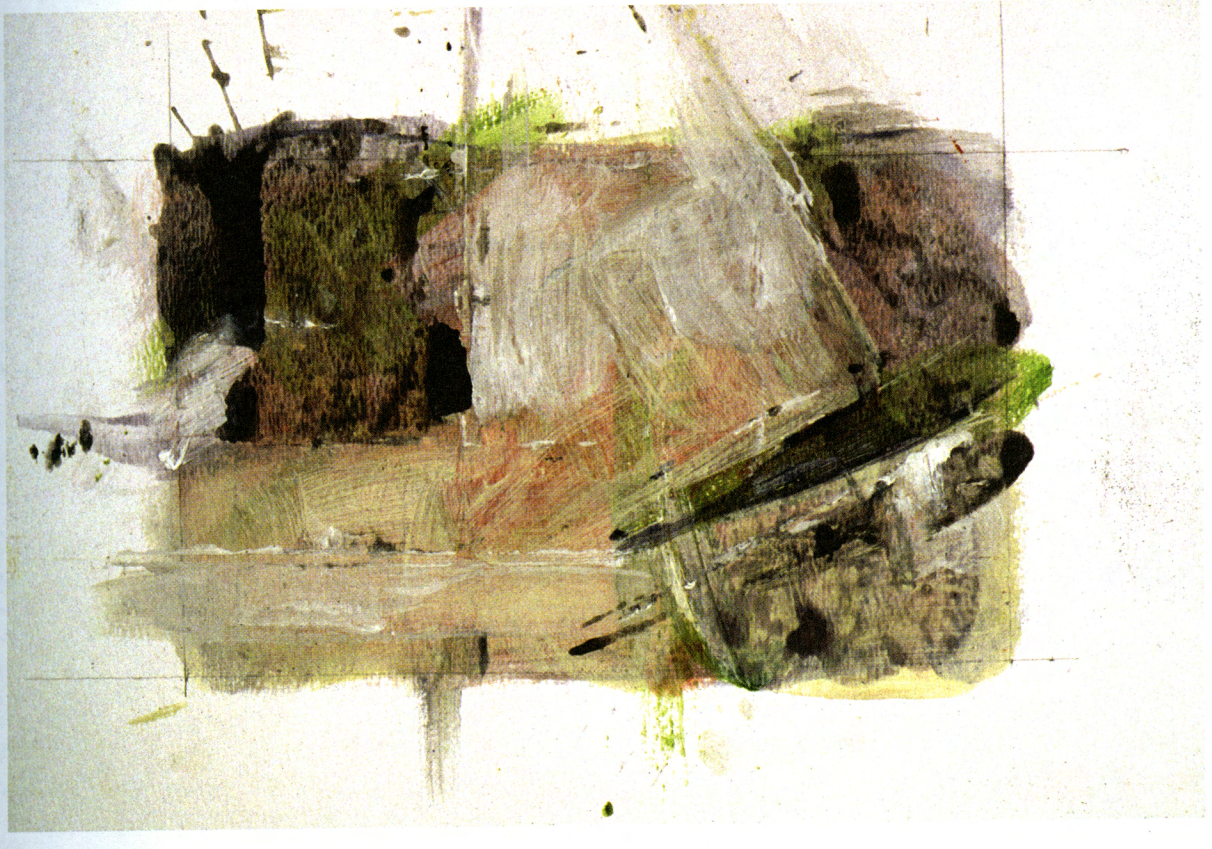
Because my hands are always
messy at the table, with my knife always
cutting in front of my fork, and the beets
always flying out from underneath,
I'll pour salt into the lakes
because I can, and because a pinch
over our shoulders still wouldn't do,
we'll pour our salt into the lakes
with the cranes looking as if
we were pulling up rivers from the ground.
They'll wait to dance on the muddy bottom
and find what they've been missing
and pull out the lost meals from ancient times.

Because it's hard to stand on one leg and watch
the wake pulling the boats to one side.
I like my fish dry, and we live
so far from the ocean. I'll be pulling up beets from the ground
because they once were the staple of our diet,
and I once was a farmer with nothing for lunch,
and you were a lute player who slept all day,
and I made us a garden of orchids and other useless plants,
and you made them grow, and I never saw you
except in the seconds when the sun flashed in the window
as I sat up awake and heard my own song in my head.

AMY PRATT *ceramic bowl*

GAY ARTHUR *oil on canvas*

JOSEF DAMASCH *oil on paper*



JOHN STONE *mixed media*

KELLY MOORE *oil on canvas*

ANGELA DITTMAR *oil on canvas*

Ajit Chittambalam FIVE EPIGRAPHS FOR A POEM I COULDN'T WRITE

1.
Last of all, the man
in the nightmare
kills the dreamer
and wakes in place of him.
His wife turns over and
falls on him like a wave.
But he is already gone and she
is wrapped in sheet. It is as if his
skin was torn and laid
like gauze on her body.

2.
A red light of a rifle is
aimed at the heart of a
sleeping soldier. An insect
flies between the path of
the man awake and the man
asleep. The red light is
like the sole light
of the darkroom,
waiting for a form
to emerge.

3.
A bird trapped in a room
with a dying woman
falls and rises in restlessness.
The woman hears the rain
on the roof between the beating,
and matches it to her heart.
She draws a curtain and the
bird flies towards the outside.
It stops because it sees a drop of
rain streak across the glass,
and lives.

4.
A prisoner asks a guard for the
time and in the breath it takes him
to reply the answer has changed.
At night, when the prisoner runs
across the compound, a spotlight follows him.
He suddenly finds himself on stage,
in the middle of a soliloquy,
unable to remember his next line.

5.
A farmer goes outside his house
and watches the sun rise. He
remembers going to the city
and seeing a girl in the window
with a light bulb above her.
He thinks that it must be the same
light that they put in a box with
his son when he was born too early.
Now, through the misting window
of his own house he sees his family.
His wife is trying to dig out her son's
heart. Wait. She's waking him
from a dream.

Lindsey Gosma **AFFAIR**

a translation of Cesare Pavese's "Avventure" (Italian)

Dawn is on the black hills and on the rooftops
the cats are becoming drowsy. A boy, like lead,
dropped from the roof tonight, breaking his back.
The wind rustles through spring trees: the red clouds,
in the distant sky are warm and move lazily.
Down the alley, a mongrel appears, then sniffs
the boy lying on the cobbles. A shriek
rises between the rooftop tiles: someone's not happy.

In the night the crickets sing, and the stars
burn out in the wind while dawn's fingers
snuff out the love in the cats' eyes,
the ones the boy spied. The female, she cries
for lack of a tom. Worthless—
the tops of the trees, even the red clouds—she cries
to the opening sky as if still night.

The boy was spying on the cats as they made love.
The snarling mongrel, who sniffed his body,
came before the dawn had: escaping its fingers
reaching from behind the farthest slope. She caught him
as he was swimming away, drenched in the river
like a meadow under morning dew. The bitches
still were howling.

The river flows calmly, skimmed
by birds. From between the red clouds they drop
with a heavy joy to find it deserted.

SUSAN BURKS *monoprint*

AARON WOLFE *photograph*

Aleš Rumpel

ON AND ON

a translation of Jan Skácel's "Pořád" (Czech)

The whole day, it's been snowing tirelessly
as if thugs had beaten to death with beer bottles in the sky a swan
and sadly feathers were falling down.

I fear dumbness's silence so
and that weight on trees and eternity
that ceased in people.
And I'm not ashamed a bit
of the anguish, God, you know that.

It's falling on me silently, wordlessly
like vain pity, at least of that we're capable
and for a word of kindness we're waiting
while outside, behind the window, it's falling.

On and on and worse.

Mark Bilbrey

INTERVIEW WITH BOB HICOK

Bob Hicok is the author of three books of poems: *The Legend of Light*, *Plus Shipping*, and his most recent book, *Animal Soul*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has won two Pushcart Prizes, as well as a NEA Fellowship. His poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, and a recent anthology, *Poets of the New Century*. He currently lives in Michigan with his wife Eve and gives the following autobiography:

> Born, yes, or hatched, not to slander my mother, in Michigan, where I've lived except for two years in Dayton, OH, home of Phil Donahue. School, high school grad, college, lots of credits–124–but no degree. I design automotive dies for a living, but I'll lie and say I'm a doctor because that I don't have to explain. A surgeon, a brain surgeon. Self taught, practiced on myself. I'm also the proud owner of a FedEx account.

The *Sequoya Review* interviewed Hicok after his visit to the Meacham Writers' Workshop in Chattanooga.

How and why did you start writing?

I began writing in a journal when a girlfriend broke up with me. Certainly not poetry, I wasn't aware of poetry then. I don't remember what I wrote, just that it was boo-hoo stuff about love. But I liked writing and continued filling notebooks after my thirty seconds of heartbreak. At the time I think I wanted to write lyrics, and this desire is what led my writing away from paragraphs and the purely personal (puh puh puh) into a shape more like poetry. I stuck with it because it made me happy. Simple. Happy in a way that sustains the moment long enough that I don't have to write all the time, but not so long that I can stay away from it for more than a few days. You've probably read that intermittent and unpredictable rewards are the best way to hook a rat on a maze or a gambler on the tables. Ditto with writing. I don't know what will happen. Beyond that I'm probably like all artists in that I love to have my say. This is what I think, feel, this is life as I see it.

At what point did you realize it was something you were going to do professionally?

"Not yet," is one glib though accurate answer. Many things touch on this question. That I'm still amazed when a poem gets accepted, much less a book. That to do something professionally means or implies a certain level of economic success that almost no poet attains from their writing alone. That art is so devalued in this country we must apply a more nebulous definition of profession to painters and poets and belly dancers. I'll give you an example. In Livonia, Michigan, a prosperous and large community west of Detroit, a movie theater was converted years back into the George Burns Center for the Performing Arts. It's closed now, the parking lot used by a local car dealership for its armada of cars and SUVs. Now, they weren't doing shadow puppets there or Martha Graham or Jorie Graham for that matter. But the community couldn't support it. The reason I mention all this is that it can take some time before you even have the sense of what it means to be a professional poet. The usual measures don't apply or apply differently. I take publishing as the measure for writers—if you can get your

poems or stories or essays into print. I became comfortable with the idea that this is what I do—that if I'll be known for anything it will be writing poetry—when I realized that by following my interests, by writing how I wanted to, often enough an editor would say yes, I'd like to offer this to others. That basic exchange between writer and editor is what defines this profession.

Who have been your influences and favorite writers? Favorite books?

William Carlos Williams is the only poet I really studied. In college I came across a bio, liked it, and started reading his poems. It's interesting, because I don't read him anymore, tried again a few months back and didn't feel the excitement for his poems I once did. What tends to happen is that I'll keep a few books around my desk—right now I have *Sun Under Wood* by Robert Hass and *The Incognito Lounge* by Denis Johnson—which I look at when I feel I'm getting lazy. Or an issue of a review—a little while back it was an issue of *Poetry Northwest* with some poems by Tina Kelley. I find her poems amazing. These books or poems end up serving as a kick in the butt, a summons to try harder when I feel I'm backing off or getting timid. Because I haven't had a mentor, finding ways to internalize the push they can deliver has been important. In that sense, my true mentor is probably *The Antaeus Anthology* that came out in the late '80s. I bought it in '90 and have chewed the hell out of it, still pick it up when I need one of several reminders—that what we do should be fun, that I can be looser than I believe or more specific than seems advisable, to run with the surprises.

How do you write? What is involved in the process? Does it change?

Best to begin with examples. I just finished a poem about a lawyer who defends people on death row. He found early on that chess was popular—as are crocheting and books on reincarnation—and began playing chess through the mail with these men. First one board in his office, then two, until he had more than a dozen games going. I knew when I read this it would be the subject of a poem and so took some notes and, when I realized I'd need a few prison names, poked around on the web, got volume C of my 1963 *World Book Encyclopedia* out to see how one would denote moves in chess (Q-KR5 or queen to king's rook five)—and waited. Then one morning I put down a line I liked about a letter arriving and was off. That's one way I work. More common is that I sit down with nothing but the desire to write, which tends to build up through the week—I generally write on Saturday and Sunday. And I wait until something comes to mind. Like:

The maple

is a system of posture for wood.
A way of not falling down
for twigs that happens
to benefits birds. I don't know.

This ends up being a poem about loneliness and falling leaves, about loss. Which isn't sappy maybe because it begins goofy. But I've come to believe many poems are justifications for first lines, or investigations of first lines, first impulses. They're really improvisations. Once I have a first line I like, that interests me or surprises me, and can push that through to four or five lines, I know I'll complete the poem. I'm hooked, want to find out what happens. And because I want the poem to be cut whole from the day, I only write as far as I'm happy. I don't put down a bunch of stuff and then go back and clean it up later. I try to edit as I go along, so that even the changes carry the force of the original impulse. This all happens pretty fast, usually pretty fast, and when it doesn't, when things bog down, often I don't like the results. I know some poets talk as if they cut a line from marble, step back for five years and only then raise the chisel again. I think of myself as an athlete, a performer. A poem is a record of what I was thinking and feeling when I sat down to write one morning. The key was working for years to be able to respond quickly. Writing every day for years, almost a decade, so that pushing images and thoughts from mind to page could become more like a reflex. It's easy to underestimate how much any of the arts are an extension of our bodies.

I don't know a ton, but it seems like your most recent book, Animal Soul, *is an improvement on* Plus Shipping *(which I also liked—until I read* Animal Soul*). Do you see yourself improving and becoming a better writer, or is it just a matter of changing for better or worse? Is improvement something you strive for or is that something you get 'beyond' eventually. That is, do you eventually reach a point where you know how to drive the car and it's just a matter of where you want to go?*

Different responses to different books; it's fun to be at the center of that. I agree with you, I think I am getting better. There's a cycle to confidence, not just in what I'm doing but the value of the whole endeavor. I go from feeling I'm not saying anything in my poems to thinking I need to be sillier, usually over a span of days. I'm not that impressed by what any of us are able to get at, versus what we can feel just beyond our fingertips. So, *I'm getting better but will always suck* is the way I look at it.

I do think *Animal Soul* is a better book. I like when others don't agree, that each book carves out its own space, but I think I'm writing a wider range of poems as I go along. One of the things I don't understand about poets is our tendency to divide into camps. I've read a couple poems and reviews of late that make a point of saying which kind of poetry is good and which bad. Narrative poets who attack poems unconcerned with making sense, lovers of the surreal who find it maudlin that people still want to write clearly about the death of a spouse, lyricists who place all their faith in sound and want us all to sing along. I want to write different poems in different ways, to develop as many approaches to a poem as I can. I feel I've done a better job of that with this book.

My poems, no matter how silly, tend to be sad eventually. A bit of hope and fun is the best I can salvage out of what is usually a pretty depressing picture by the time I'm done with it. Then I realize that all my favorite poems and poets have the same tendency. Does this say something about poetry or about people or both?

I ask you because I see something similar in your poems, in particular the poem "Did I ever tell you about my love / hate relationship with confessional poetry?" in which you write: "Even now you could ask that I imagine / a field and instead of poppies waving / blue heads I'd picture a tractor on fire, / smoke and a farmer standing back, resigned / with hands in pockets as if this too / is just a change of season." But in this poem it is not just the poet imagining this dark, violent side of truth, but honesty inevitably reveals that side, whether it makes a good "narrative" or not. Is the poet simply resigned as the farmer is to watch the fire, or is this darkness and violence at the heart of the art, of honesty perhaps?

Mark, this is a great question. I've wondered for some time why this doesn't come up. I wrote several responses and decided the best way to answer is with a poem.

Days like chocolate

Being asked why so many poems are sad
is like being asked why so many
first dates are only dates or dreams
a final exam for which you're late
and running naked. I was reminded
of the woman who a) had a job b)
had a daughter c) lost her job
and d) lost her daughter,
though answering the question
thus only made the pile
of sadness grow and those
who would climb it work harder
with less oxygen to fuel
the feathery lungs. I am inclined
to hope for people
days like chocolate
covering the skin of the beloved,
which presupposes a beloved
willing to be cleaned by the tongue
and the kind of job with benefits
in case the application
of chocolate goes awry
and a trip to the hospital's
required and there I go, drifting
among sad waters. Sad waters
run deep and are full of men
in fins with spear guns.
To end this poem by saying

the woman got her daughter back
would be a smiling lie. She did
get a job building cheeseburgers,
hasn't had a drink
in ninety six days and sees
her daughter on weekends.
They go to the park
and climb the metal turtle
in the sandbox and later
buy shaved ice
soaked with red sugar or purple
or green. Just imagining
the little girl licking ice
and hopping like firecrackers
are going off in her shoes
is fun behind closed eyes
even though the woman
cries on the phone about
how much not enough this is
though better than it was.
Most poems are sad because poets
have windows and telephones,
check books and sisters, eyes
that turn to dinner plates
at the first mention of bread.
Because all poems
are love poems to the vanishing.

Your answer makes a lot of sense and reminds me of something else that interests me. I love reading poetics essays, and recently James Tate came out with a "Poets on Poetry" book called The Route as Briefed. *Books from that series are usually completely filled with poetics essays and interviews. Tate's book has a couple essays and a couple interviews, but most of it is little stories, journal excerpts (real or imagined), and even a recipe for "Squirrel Brains in Black Butter." Even Marvin Bell fills his poetics book* Old Snow Just Melting *with stories—one chapter was solely about his attempt at a marathon. So I sent you a question and you sent me a poem. I wonder how much we can say about poetry before resorting to poetry. I even wonder how much we say and write about poetry has to do with poetry at all. Do poetics essays undermine the legitimacy of the poems themselves by implying that poetry needs to be explained in prose?*

Seven. Or Marvin Hagler. Both seem a good answer. I'm reminded of a statement attributed to Lorrie Anderson: "Talking about music is like dancing about architecture." Our attempts to describe how we do almost anything are failed attempts, certainly within the arts. We don't know and want to know, want there to be something akin to a formula to protect us if our talents diminish. That's one thing. Another, in thinking about Bell and Tate, is that they have engaging personalities. This comes across in their work and I'm sure in how they write about what they do. Particularly with Tate I think it would contradict his poetry to explain his poetry, and stories are more interesting anyway. I'll pass on the squirrel though.

I don't think poetics necessarily undermine poetry. I've been annoyed recently by a couple books on poetry because it's clear the poet is making a case for what he or she writes. You know, poetry should be *this* and—surprise!—*this* is exactly what he or she is up to, theories presented as if at some ideological remove when a cursory awareness of the poet's work reveals how autobiographical their notions are. I'd trust these things more if people were up front—*I hate narrative and want to kill it and that's what I'm after in this book,* or *I think Rilke was a big fart and everyone should know how bad he smelled.* Just go on record with where you jump off—the givens. This stuff is a matter of taste—there's very little objective about it. What would impress me most is to read a book in which a poet explains why a group of poems or poets he or she doesn't like are good. We will always want to write about writing, consciousness has the quality of one mirror turned toward another such that you see your head in infinite regress. Seeing my head once is bad enough. I'd rather write poems and read the comics.

Where does poetry stand in this country these days? Is it okay that I only know a handful of people who care about poetry? I'm not so worried about its lack of popularity, but that it is becoming unreadable for so many people, a foreign language no longer taught in schools. Is poetry only for poets anymore? How important is poetry to society?

I've enjoyed how poets respond to this line of questioning: poetry's fine, poetry's dead, poetry's got good feet but bad gums and breath. I don't know. We each see some things, know some people, read some stuff, and extrapolate. Just today in conversations, the popularity of Billy Collins came up, that few younger poets read James Wright was lamented, and the desire of many poets to write complicated poems was explained to me as the downfall of the art. Poetry's got good gams but no jump shot. Random thoughts. I don't mind that poetry's small. Because it is, poets can write what they want, have to write what they feel for there to be anything on the page. We're almost invisible, so who cares what you say. Freedom. Poetry's not going away even though it's small. Society needs this, or else it would have vanished. There isn't much money for the majority of people involved. How many people get laid because they wrote a really swell sonnet? But it's here. I think there's more poetry available, there's greater visibility for women and minorities. There are stupid tensions within the various poetry communities: people who hate poems that make sense and people who hate poems that don't make sense and many people who hate all poems they've not written. Billy Collins and Jorie Graham, 15 rounds, winner takes nothing. Poetry's got a bum hip and dead aim. I like it. It should come in a can. And one request. Please, no more baseball poems. I'm sorry. What I meant to say is no more baseball.

WILLIAM R. TOMKINS JR. *graphite drawing*

JASON DUVALL Confection / *photograph*

When I was very young, adults' hands hypnotically impressed me. They were so able. I suspect that my superfluous admiration of their hands stemmed from an ineptitude with my own. In our district, such manual inability was the blatant antithesis of the resourcefulness that surrounded my childhood. Everyone in our district seemed to have exceptional manual prowess.

Four particular sets of hands constantly arrested my attention. My Auntie Caroline had the most immaculate pair I had ever seen. She had exquisite long fingers and nails that were never manicured nor decorated but flawless in shape and form. All this was covered by soft caramel skin, yet her palms were rather scaly.

Scaly and rough described my Uncle Agrippa's hands. Though he had Aunt Caroline's caramel skin, its dryness underlined his disdain for "western cosmetics" like lotion. His fingernails were always tainted red because of his hobby of slaughtering livestock. Before his inevitable death, I first associated him with mortality by this hobby. His hands, though, compounded my insecurity about my manual deficiencies, because they demonstrated an astonishing talent for remedying complicated situations, always with his late father's gold Rolex watch on his wrist.

My mother always had something you needed in her hand. I seldom saw them bare in my childhood. When I did, it usually spelled trouble. If my brother and I neglected our oral hygiene, she administered a slap on the face followed by a breath mint. I also recall an incident when I was seven where school conversational currency influenced an ill-advised outburst. Unaware of my mother's presence nearby, I blurted out, "Bloodyfuckenshit!" I cannot even remember what prompted it. I think I had lost a card game to my brother. The indiscretion prompted a vicious backhand across the face from my mother. I do remember apologizing expediently and repeatedly, not wanting to feel her bare hand which was shaping to strike me again.

Auntie Caroline's neighbor, Van Nilsten, had scary hands. I knew little about him as a child. Once, I saw him leaving his garden holding a shotgun and concluded I knew enough about him. Every time I saw him, he had a deadly instrument in his hand, be it a knife, a whip, or an axe. Uncle Agrippa naturally used such essentials as well in our semi-rural society, but in the fat fingers of a middle-aged colonial type like "Nils," they seemed less utilitarian.

Rusape was not exactly rustic, yet the absence of typical urban conveniences made practicality essential. For example, there was no butcher in the district,

so each year when Auntie Caroline's animal farm became too big for the confines of her garden, my Uncle Agrippa would chop down the burgeoning flock over the course of a weekend. I always watched captivated at a distance, observing the sheep being slaughtered in Caroline's back garden. As a few of my elder cousins each held a limb of one of the sheep, Agrippa would simultaneously slice through layers of succulent flesh and dispatch the meat into bowls. I revered the nonchalant and dexterous ease with which he performed a task of such severity. I envied how effortless it was for him. At the end of these days of slaughter Uncle Agrippa would approach me in a vampire stance waving his bloody hands as his Rolex gleaned in the late afternoon sunlight. I was never scared nor was I impressed by his sense of humor. Least impressive were the numerous mutton dinners that followed.

The site of these many ovine slaughters is where I spent much of my childhood. I was a self-absorbed child in the sense that my peers—cousins with whom I spent those holidays and even my elder brother—were always peripheral figures in my childhood thoughts. I was preoccupied with adults and harbored a misguided impatience to grow up and be like them. I idolized Auntie Caroline and Uncle Agrippa and thus I frequently drifted to their bungalow when the incessant arguing of my parents had ceased to be disconcerting and only elicited boredom.

Auntie Caroline was not actually my Aunt. She and my mother had met in university, had become study partners, and consequently became like sisters. Indeed, having been raised with three elder brothers (all of whom are dead), my mother often alluded to "Caro" as the younger sister for whom she had always wished. By virtue of what I thought was a rather dubiously established relation, I referred to her as "Auntie Caro." Logically, her brother Agrippa became "Uncle Agrippa."

My favorite moments were at the beginning of the winter holidays. I'd go to Caroline and Agrippa's house straight from school. I always arrived there scruffy from playground scuffles. Auntie Caro would shake her head, smiling at my fallen stockings, my tie which had slipped sideways under my collar, and filthy khakis. She had the most delightful way of greeting me. She would bend over, cup my cheeks, and kiss me gently on the edge of my mouth. Her maternal instincts were sometimes the source of some irritation. If I had missed a spot on my face when applying lotion, she would lick her index finger and rub the dry patch to remove the whiteness. Auntie Caro would laugh at my exaggerated frown. She'd take me on her lap and I would relate all my accomplishments of the past school term, embellishing as I chattered away, probably because of a subconscious but incorrect deduction that she was unsophisticated.

I have a vivid recollection of the winter holidays of 1987. The final school day ended at noon, and I played football with my pals till dusk. I set off for Lesape Street, where

Caro and Agrippa lived, kicking pebbles along the gravel road, mimicking the moves of Maradona. I found Auntie Caro in her kitchen in the midst of the displeasing odor of muttonchops. As I sat on her lap on the veranda, I told her what I had learned that term. I advised her to use more salt in preparing her muttonchops lest we all develop goiters. I asked her if she knew about the Challenger explosion—because I did. I informed her that I had read some Dickens. (Actually, Miss Moyo had read our class an abridged version of *Great Expectations* over a few weeks.)

Relaying these somewhat embroidered details, I was continually aware of her scent. Caro smelled like clean laundry. Every time her fingers tapped me on the cheeks, the scent was more distinct. I knew it was her body scent because when her clothes were no longer clean she still had it. Her scent made her seem more domesticated—the sort of person who was always doing laundry and thus a tad less sophisticated. Because of that, it mystified me that she was unmarried. Particularly, at her age. I estimated (she never ventured details) that she was about four or five years younger than my mother, which would have made her about 31.

In that winter of 1987, Uncle Agrippa orchestrated my virgin ovine slaughter. Retrospect permits me the realization of the necessity of the deed. At the time, however, it was unpleasant. I had unwisely developed a one-sided rapport with this particular lamb; I even christened him "Pip" after the protagonist of *Great Expectations.* The simplicity of the name appealed to me. A simple premise dictated Uncle Agrippa's eagerness to put Pip under the knife: muttonchops.

Uncle Agrippa went to the tape deck on the veranda and inserted his Bob Marley selection. The tape appropriately began with his personal anthem, "Zimbabwe." "O-o!" Uncle Agrippa said. He grabbed my left wrist and placed the blunt butcher knife in the palm of my hand, his red stained fingers closing mine over the handle.

Pip's foreboding glance stung me. I did not know whether I perceived it to be a look of betrayal because of my misplaced loyalty to the lamb or whether it was just cowardice. I was aware of the first verse of "Zimbabwe."

...Evry man has right to decide his... own destiny, but in this judgment there is...

Despite my apprehension, I started to sever the neck, but with my head turned away. I knew the sickening moisture I felt on my neck was blood spewing from Pip's throat. Halfway through Pip's neck, the blunt knife refused to cut any further. Repulsed by the

sanguinary mess I had already created, I began to bludgeon the bloody throat frantically. As my mind spun, I was still aware of Bob Marley's searing vocal.

Mash it up a in a Zimbabwe-e-e-e...

Uncle Agrippa put me out of my misery by moving me out of the way and decapitating Pip with the single swing of an axe. Uncle Agrippa made light of the fact that I had capitulated under the weight of expectation. That was his way. My failure did not scar me nor did it make me feel any less of a man. But I retain vivid memories of that afternoon. I shan't soon forget his gleaming Rolex moving up and down in the sunlight as he administered the coup de grace. Nor Pip's head resting on Auntie Caro's lawn wearing a glazed expression. It was an expression I would see often in the coming years.

The waning abilities of Agrippa's hands prompted a curiosity that was consequence of alarm. In the three years after that winter, I had not seen him. He had found work as a truck driver for a furniture company and frequently traveled between the Congo and South Africa. It was apparent when he was not around because he possessed a presence that was conspicuous. As I grew taller, I realized that he was a very short man, about five-feet-five. Yet his domineering and assertive personality enhanced his diminutive stature, a demeanor that was well complemented by a powerful resonating voice that seemed to consume all the oxygen in the air.

I suspected that something was amiss in the winter of 1990. With Caro's flock unusually high, I supposed Agrippa hadn't the time to cut it down that year. I had heard he was back on medical leave. I did not think much of it and my brother and I ventured to Lesape Street to welcome him home. Agitated with excitement, I thought about whether he would notice I had grown. I wondered whether he had changed. He had.

When I saw him, I did not actually look at him. I concentrated on his hand. I yearned to show him that I had acquired a firm handshake. He had always urged me to "shake hands like a real slayer, a real hunter-gatherer." As I extended my hand, he grabbed it and swayed my arm with his as African men typically do. He seemed to hold on to my hand instead of shaking it. His fingers shook involuntarily. The Rolex he always proudly wore dangled loosely on his wrist.

I looked up and met his eyes. My horror must have been obvious because his eyes shifted nervously, intermittently focusing on me. In those eyes there was nothing but matter, the same blank expression that was on Pip's face as his detached head lay in the lawn of Caro's garden.

"Ko ndeipi, mufana?" He asked, and then said, "Mhoro."

"Mhoro," was my normal reply. I did not quite know what to say next. "Where's Auntie Caro?"

"She went pamusika to buy tomatoes and bread." I could actually read his lips because they appeared to have lost pigment and were pink. Their movements were very noticeable against the scaly blackened facade that was now his skin.

"Ho," I acknowledged.

"Uh huh."

That encounter was, up to that point, the most disturbing in my life. I failed to comprehend how adults were somehow fallible. It was also then that I first heard the expression *zvemazuva ano.* I first heard it from Caro, one day on her veranda as I articulated to her my confusion at her brother's physical deterioration. Having not yet been mature enough to exercise tact, I did not broach the subject delicately. "Why does Uncle Agrippa look like he's dying?" The blunt comment did not surprise her.

"Ahhhhh, mwanangu!" she gasped in resigned laughter, "ndezvemazuva ano." I suppose, at eleven, I was still at an age where I took most things in a very literal sense. I kept mulling over the English translation in my head. *It's what happens these days... what happens these days?*

Because Agrippa's condition resembled that of another two million Zimbabweans, I came to know what happens "these days." Knowing the plague of the day did not make it any more comprehensible, a scarcely believable pandemic with a farcical death toll. Agrippa died four years later in 1994 of influenza.

The only time I visited him during his long illness we stared at each other as if we were in a confessional. The image of him, bedridden with boils and swollen lymph nodes was too much to handle. The drone of his failing voice shattered me more than his fragile form. His voice, I thought, would always be with him. Though I told him who I was and he mumbled some choice anecdotes from my childhood, his countenance remained blank without an iota of recognition. I know he did have moments of clarity because his trembling hands would rise to hide tears trickling down his face. Bereft of his imposing qualities, he looked ashamed that I should see him. I resolved not to return. That one visit was our penance. Caro, who nursed him during his final year, understood. "There's only so much morbidity we can see," she mused.

Gradually, following the telling encounter with Agrippa, my value for human life diminished considerably. The plague not only left a trail of bodies in its wake but it also eroded my capacity for compassion, which was replaced by a disturbing pragmatism towards the ubiquitous human wasting. When someone died, the proclamation "zvemazuva ano" fostered a laissez-faire attitude towards the staggering numbers of the

walking-dead in our little town that highlighted a festering humanity. Only the efficiency with which Agrippa used to slaughter sheep was comparable to the potency of the plague.

Revelations came in the oddest forms. For example, Caro's neighbor, the Afrikaner divorcee, Van Nilsten died in 1996. *The Rusape Post* attributed his death to cardiac arrest. "Cardiac arrest!" my father scoffed at this journalistic platitude, "Of course he died of cardiac arrest!" This was one of the few significant contributions my father made to my childhood recollections. An idle intellectual who read *The Guardian* religiously, he did not interest me.

"Hmmm... zvemazuva ano!" my mother concurred.

We weren't particularly fond of Nils. Caro told me he had come up from South Africa in the late seventies to shift his timber company because there was cheap black labor in what was still Rhodesia. His immigration was obviously ill timed, because 1980 signaled British intervention in colonial rule of its former colony and facilitated the genesis of our country. Apparently his business failed to thrive, which became a source of tension between he and Mrs. Van Nilsten, who returned home to Cape Town to live with her parents and her two sons.

As a child, I had found Nils to be a surly middle aged man and a blatant and unrepentant racist. I likened him to another Dickens character: Scrooge. My brother and I did little to alter his bigoted view of black people by continually scaling the corrugated iron fence that separated his house and Caro's, stealing his mulberries. It always made him cross. Nils bred fruit trees prodigiously well.

Perhaps he resented us because we reminded him that he had sons that he rarely saw. He could speak makeshift Shona, but addressed all in English rather than condescend to the local tongue. As little children, he would chase us out of his garden calling us "facetious little boys." I suspect he enjoyed castigating our childish indiscretions. Our relationship (or lack of one) actually manifested a degree of normalcy

in his life. Tales of sexual aberration had made Nils notorious in Rusape. His alcohol binges usually led him to seek solace with prostitutes. It is rumored that he got violent with his prostitutes but that they tolerated him because he paid handsomely. One of my cousins said he once overheard the adults talking about whether Nils fancied young black boys too.

Some time before his death, I had a rather revealing conversation with Nils at the fence dividing his and Caro's property. Nils' cordial, even traditional greeting gave credence to the town whispers of his dementia. "Mhoro, mufana," he said.

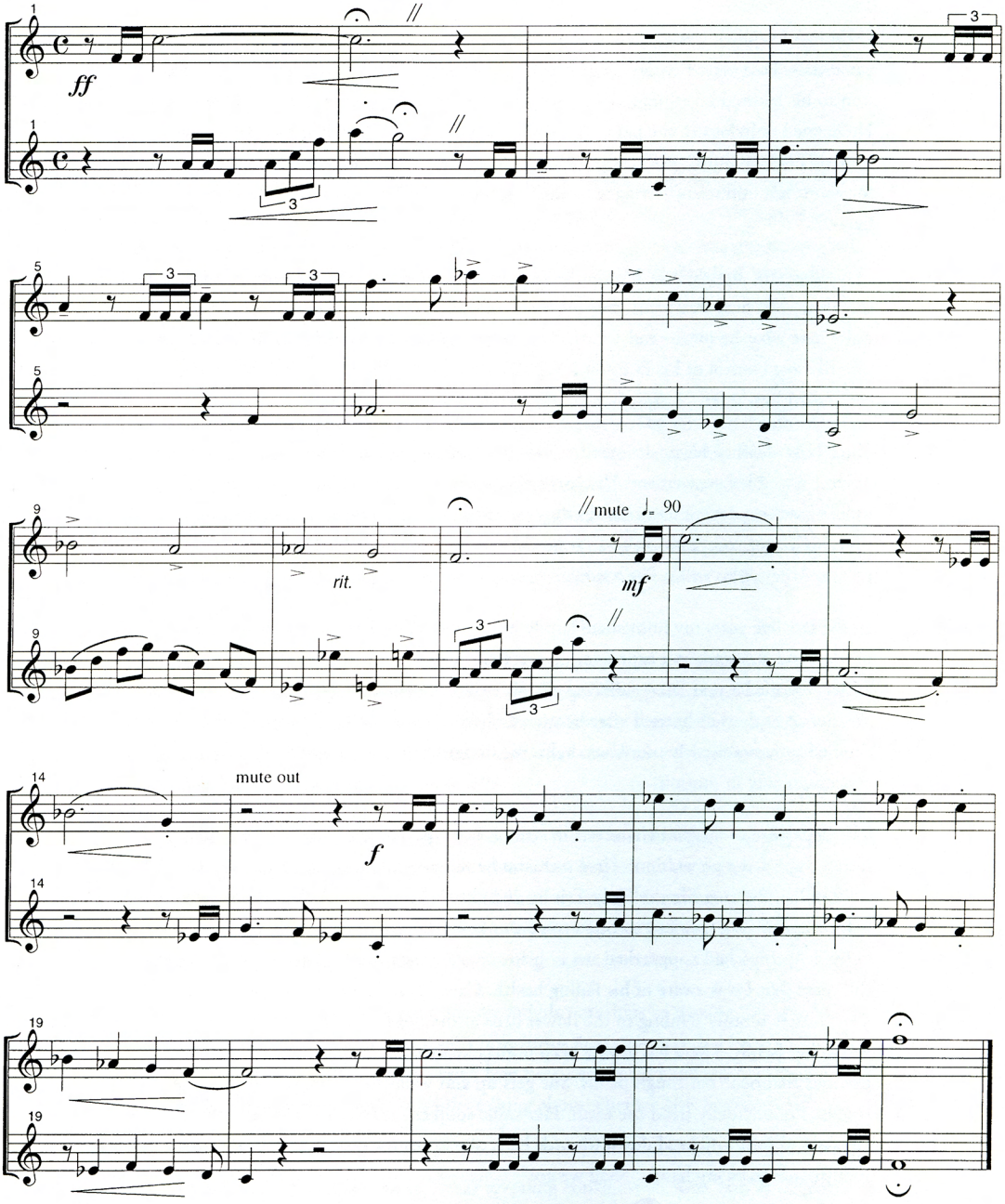
"Mhoro," I replied. I was taken aback as I surveyed his blank smile through the corrugated bars. He bore a peculiar grin and the putrid smell of malt *kachasu* brought attention to his labored breathing. His wrists hung on the corrugated iron fence, bleeding. He seemed oblivious to the pain. The wrists themselves were swollen to a degree symptomatic of elephantitis, yet his once chubby fingers had become bony. Nils detained me for about ten minutes, chatting as though we were old friends. A surreal sight to behold.

"You like her?" he laughed. He was looking over my shoulder at Caro who was picking tomatoes. His next statement gave me a nervous disposition. "I like her too!" I was quite sure what he meant and I started to remember that I detested him. If he had temporarily lost control of his faculties I was sure he regained them, with the last words I ever heard him utter. "I thought you Afs abhorred barren women."

Since Nils' death, I have felt myself regress into my childish self-absorption. The subsequent inevitable bereavements have made little impact on me because they are not unlike anything I have seen, nor do they represent the last time I shall experience them. I am no longer compelled to go to funerals, shed crocodile tears while counting off fellow mourners who will suffer a similar fate.

In the last five years my immediate family has passed away. I neglected to visit my mother and see her blank expression in her final year. So, unsurprisingly, did my father. He died a year later, suffering a heart attack while reading his newspaper. My brother recently shot himself after he was discharged from the local hospital after being deemed untreatable. My numbness helps me understand that he was catalyzing a process already in motion.

The departure of familiar characters in such a short space of time makes it feel like I have progressed a generation. Time seems to be moving faster. In the cemetery, I cynically watch Caro signify the Holy Trinity and clutch her Rosary as she kneels, praying before Agrippa's grave. For some reason I think about how I might have reacted differently if Agrippa had approached me in his vampire stance waving his bloody hands, in the years that I was aware of his failing health. Caro strides a few graves over and kneels down, meticulously tending to the flower beds at the headstone where Nils rests. I watch her hands. There has always been understatement in her movements, soft hand gestures that belie her rough palms. She gets up and walks up to me gently as though she does not actually tread the earth. Her smile soothes me. She reaches up to my cheeks and pulls my head down towards hers. She kisses me gently on the side of my mouth and grabs my hand. "Shall we go?"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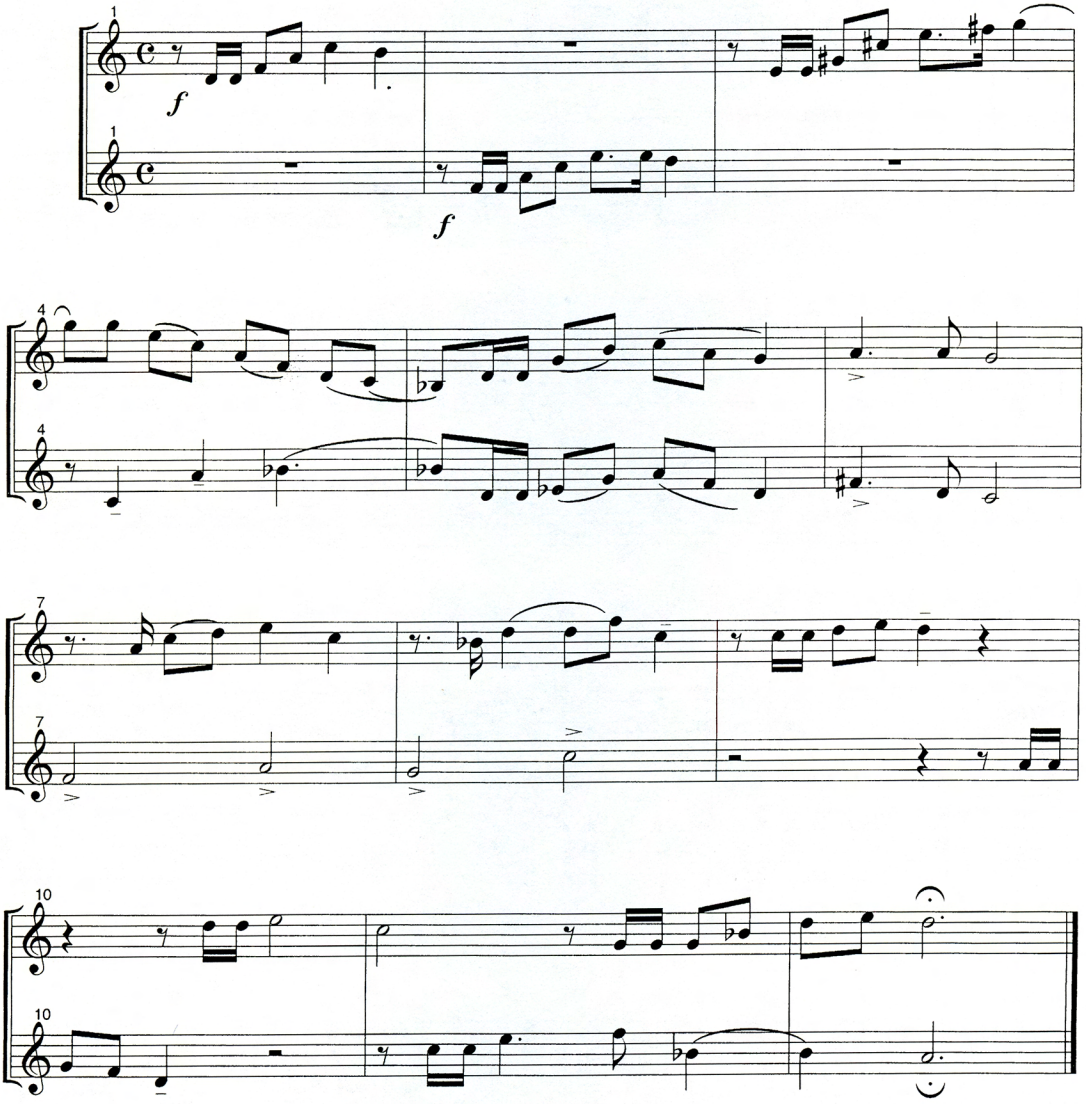
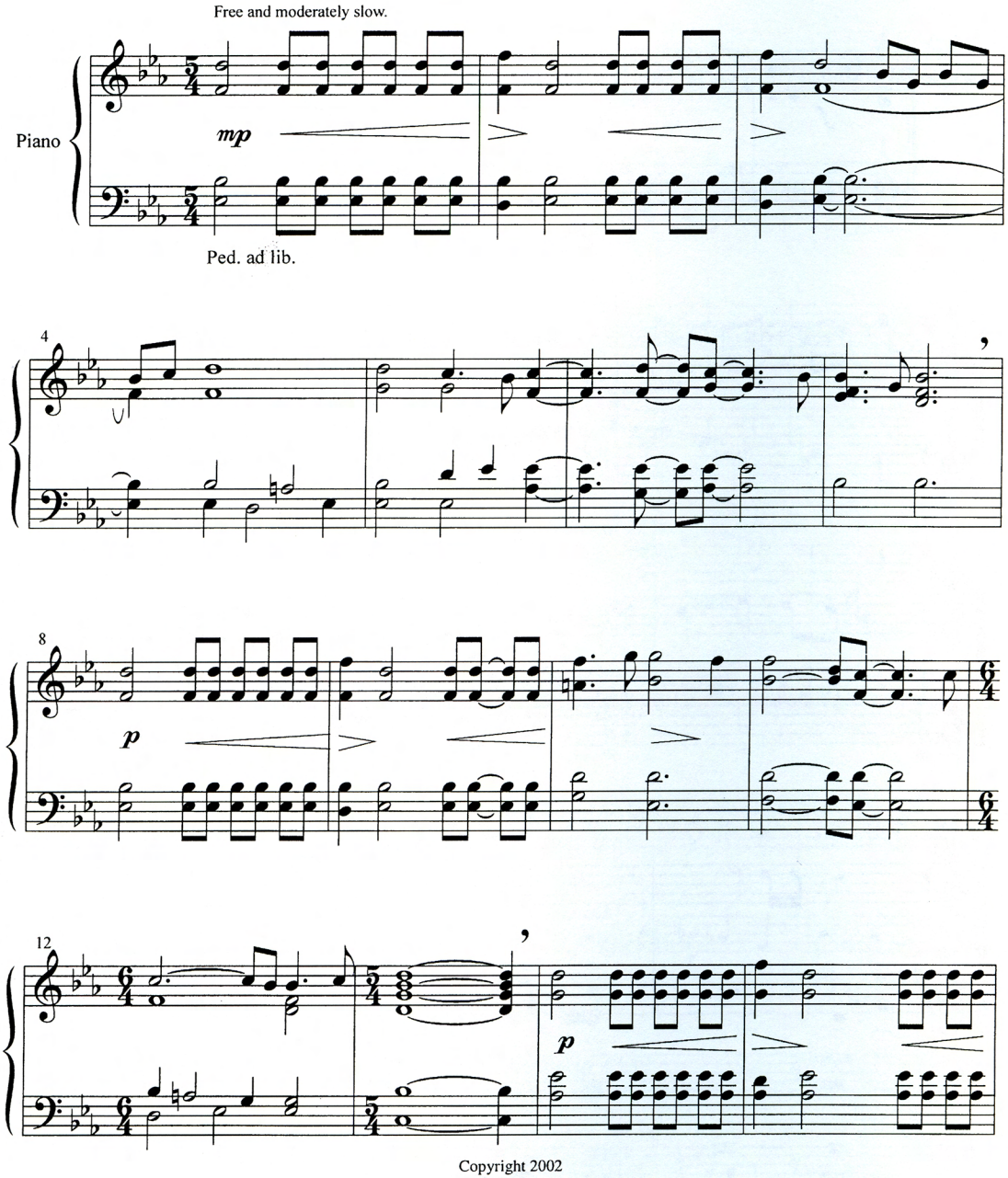
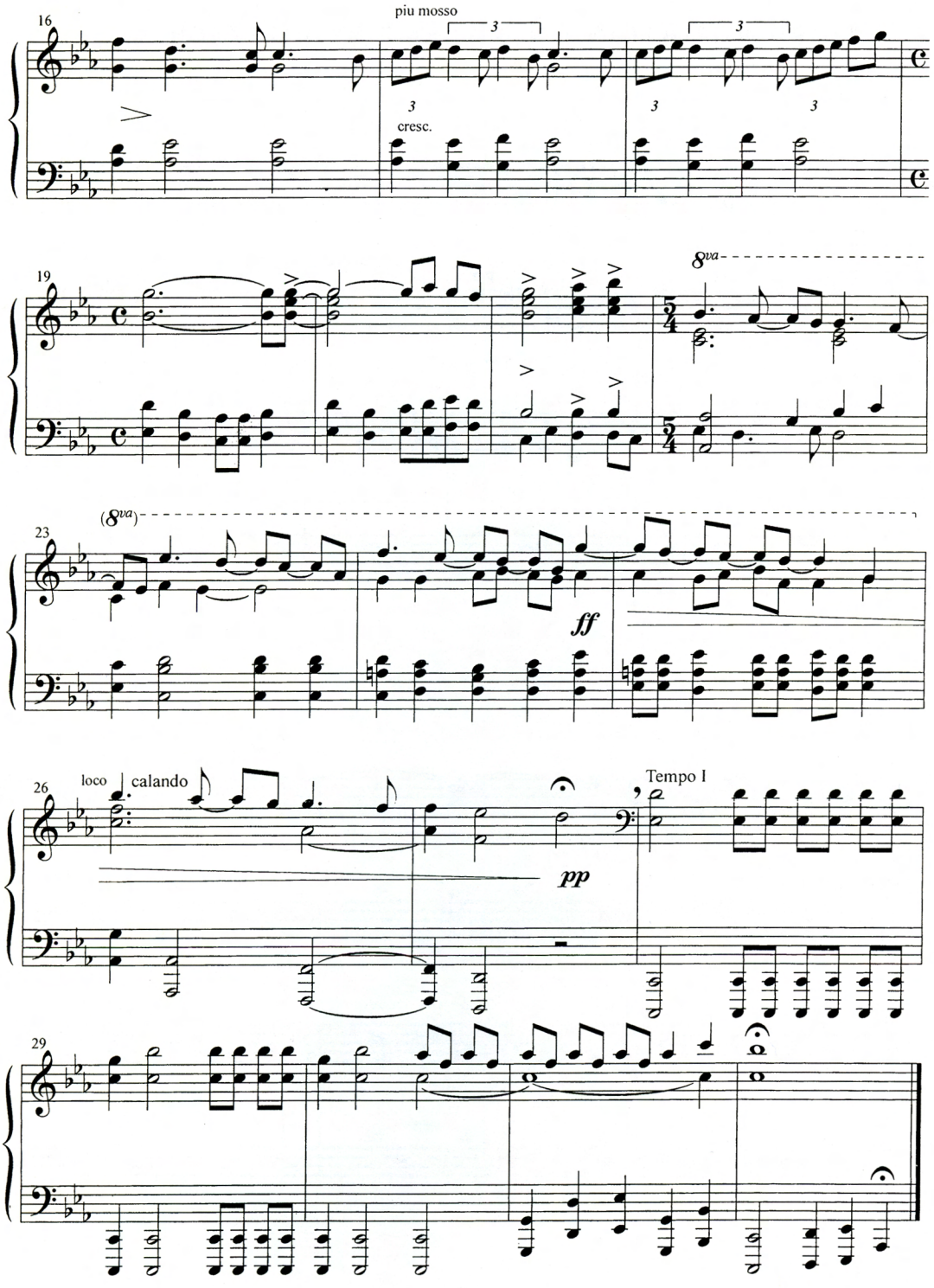


YOU CANNOT TURN AWAY, EVEN WHEN YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES.

Matthew McNabb

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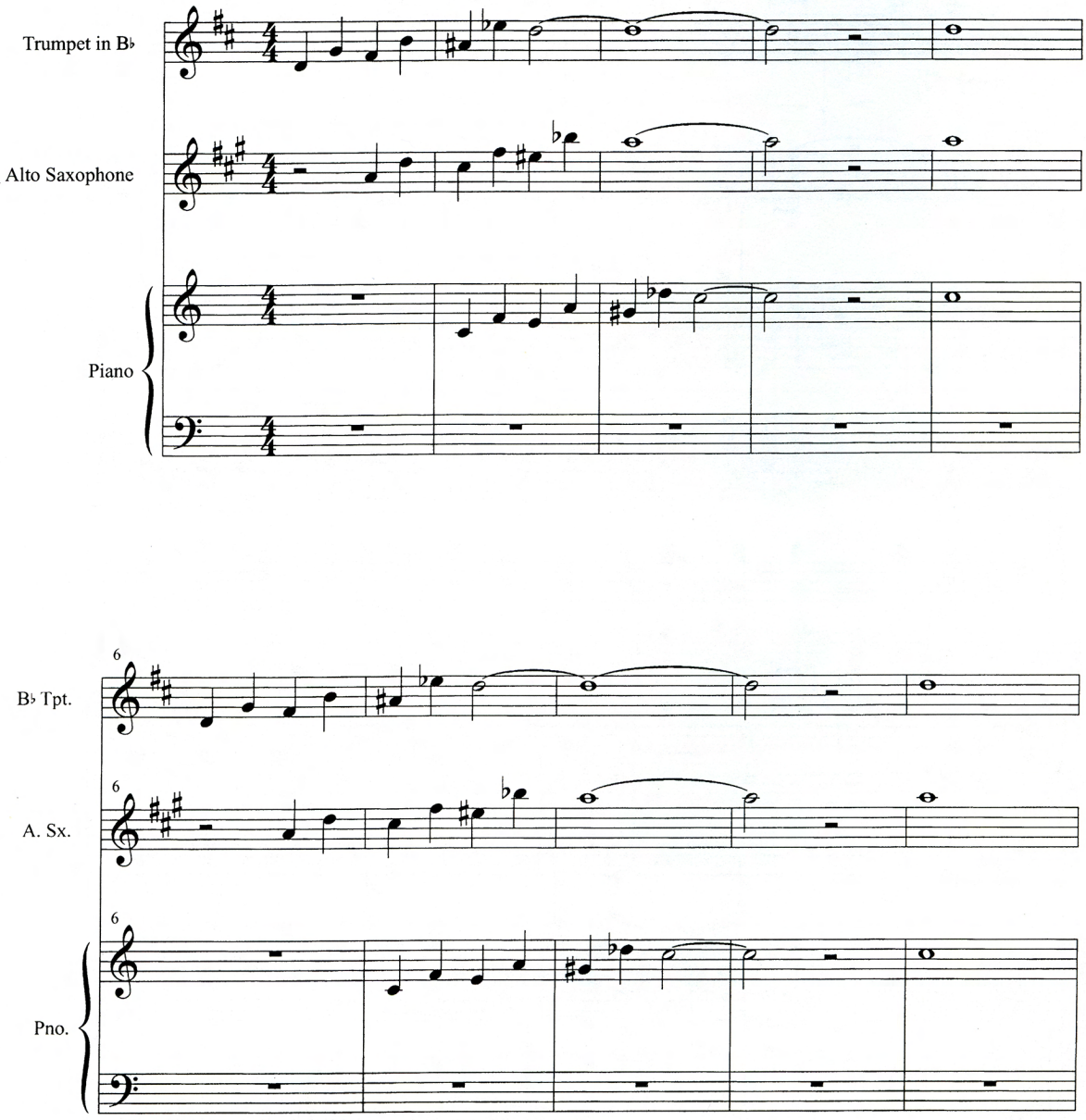
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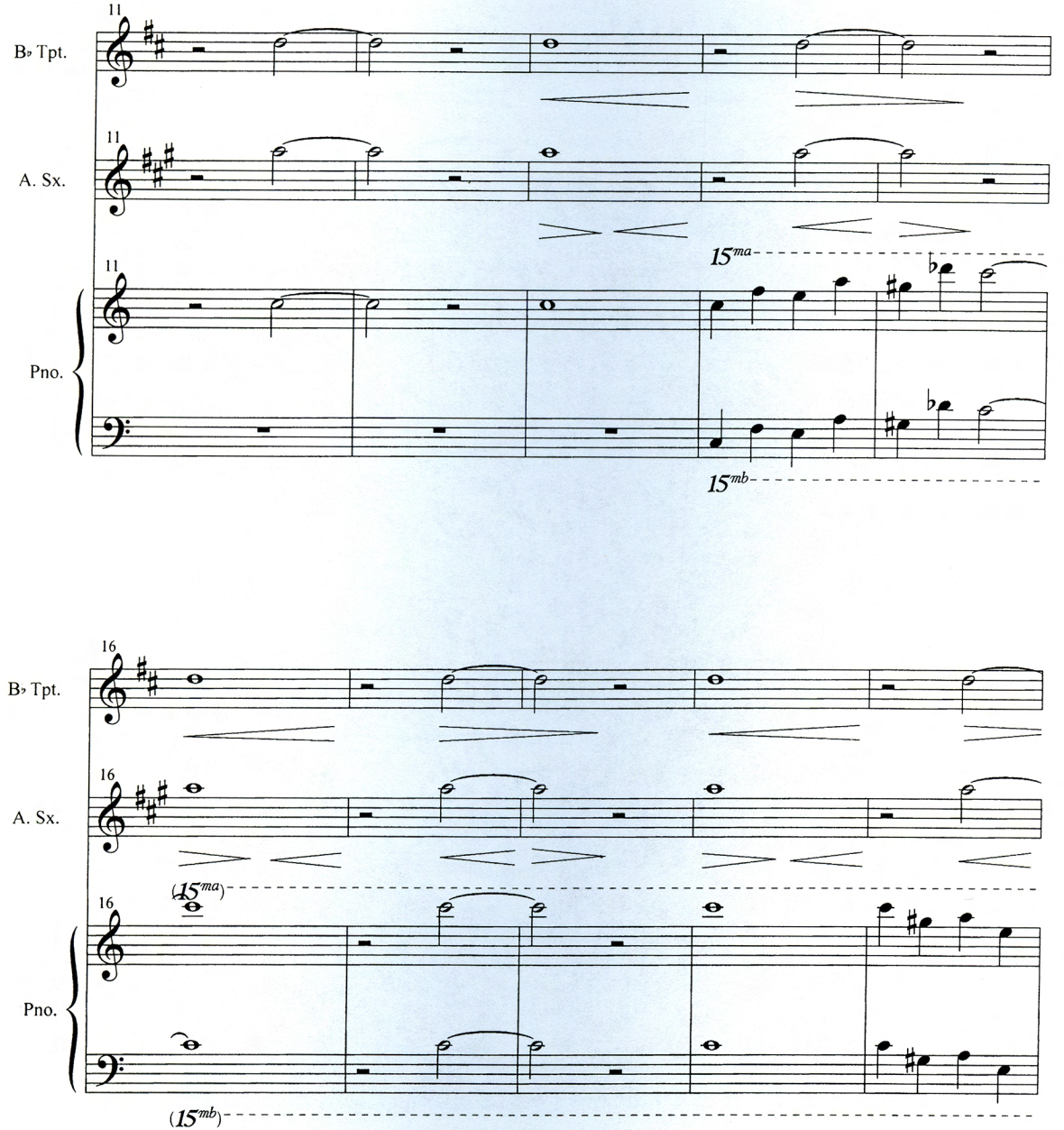
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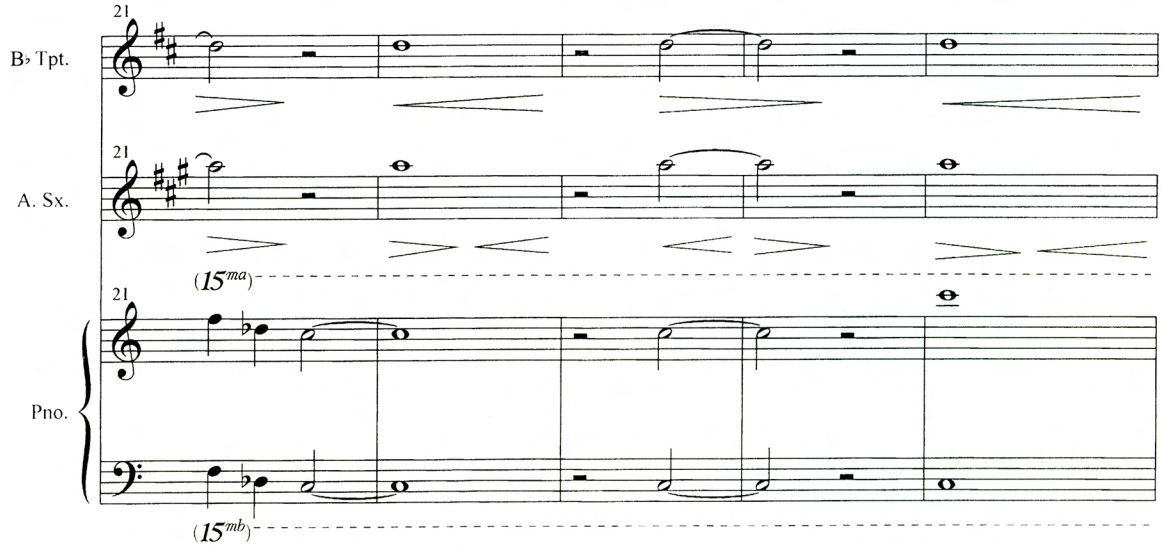
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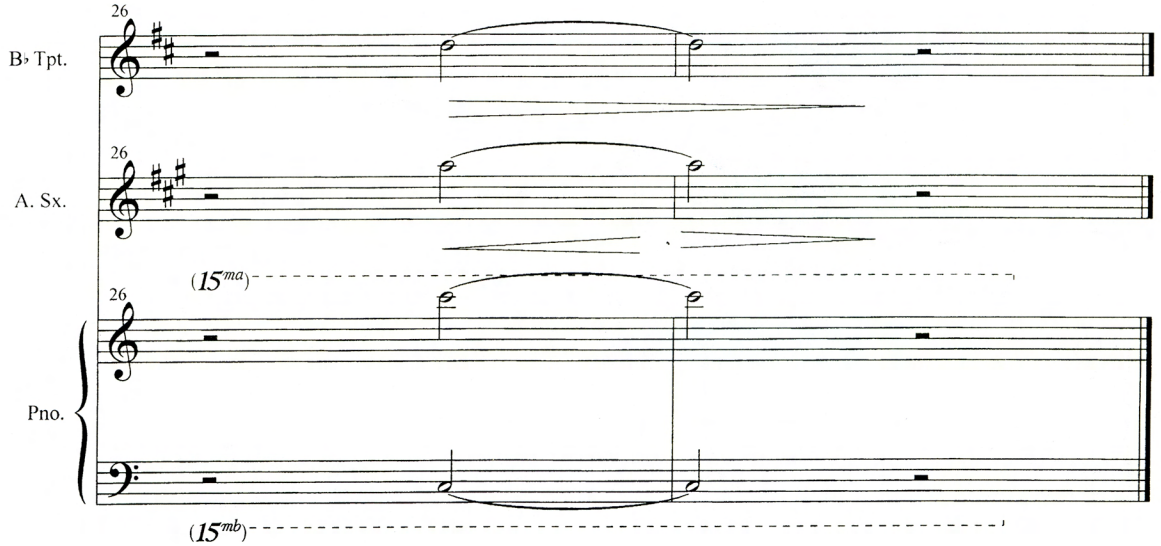
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PATRICK NELLIGAN *mixed media*

ADAM WHITE *polaroid*

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